

Increasing Live Outcomes at the Fort Worth Animal Shelter

Executive Summary:

For the past several years the City of Fort Worth has been focused on increasing its animal shelter live release rate. While economic conditions have not been conducive to large-scale program enhancements, the City has demonstrated its commitment to this effort by successfully implementing several new initiatives that have had positive results.

Highlighting these new initiatives include:

- A new spay/neuter clinic
- Enhanced preventive medicine protocols at the shelter
- Two new satellite adoption centers in partnership with PetSmart and PetSmart Charities
- Implementation of a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) policy for feral cats.

On the near horizon are additional projects that are in-process, including pursuit of funding for a medical isolation ward at the shelter and partnerships to provide low/no-cost spay/neuter programs as a means to reduce pet overpopulation and the number of animals abandoned at area shelters.

The City enjoys strong partnerships with a diverse group of animal welfare agencies, including more than 100 local animal rescue groups. Efforts have been made to enhance these partnerships and provide incentives for rescue groups to make our shelter a desired partner. Part of these efforts include providing spay/neuter, vaccinations, and microchip services at no cost for every animal taken from our shelter by a rescue group.

Much has been accomplished, but there is much more to do. Our efforts to date have resulted in a significant increase in our shelter live release rate from 35% in 2009 to a high of 70% in December 2012 and a sustained average rate of 65% for the past year. Healthy, adoptable animals are now finding new homes; however, we continue to strive to work with the next tier of shelter animal that has illness, injury or temperament issues that are potentially manageable or treatable with additional time and resources.

Below is a detailed overview of the City's ongoing plan to increase live outcomes with accomplishments to date specific to each objective.

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The Plan:

GOAL # 1 – Reduce the number of animals coming to the shelter

Strategy 1.A. – Increase and promote Spay/Neuter

- a. Strengthen ordinances promoting S/N
- b. Ensure no adopted animal leaves the shelter unaltered
- c. Enhance and expand community S/N resources

Progress...

- ✓ Passed ordinance in 2009 requiring all pets be altered unless owner obtains an intact pet permit
- ✓ Spay/Neuter clinic built and opened Feb. 21, 2009 as part of shelter operations
- ✓ Finalized negotiations with private veterinarian to utilize clinic space on weekends to perform low-cost S/N to the general public
- ✓ Established partnerships with Texas Coalition for Animal Protection (TCAP) and Kaufman County Animal Awareness Project (KCAAP) to provide low/no-cost spay/neuter services in zip codes where the highest number of animal shelter intakes originate

Strategy 1.B. – Increase Licensing, Rabies Vaccination Rates & Microchipping

- a. Increase percentage of animals with I.D. to prevent/shorten shelter stays
- b. Increase herd immunity – rabies

Progress...

- ✓ Established partnership with TCAP to provide low-cost vaccination clinics every Thursday evening at the Fort Worth animal shelter
- ✓ All animals adopted from shelter have City license and microchip prior to release

Strategy 1.C. – Investigate Feral Cat Trap/Neuter/Release (TNR) Program

- a. Limit numbers of feral cats coming into shelter

Progress...

- ✓ A new TNR policy was adopted in 2012 with program implementation underway

GOAL #2 – Provide excellent care and a healthy environment for animals housed at the shelter

Strategy 2.A. – Implement Enhanced Preventive Medicine / Vaccination Program at Shelter

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a. Reduce risk of shelter-acquired illness

Progress...

- ✓ Began vaccinating every dog and cat for Bordetella and Distemper at intake – Sept. 2008
- ✓ Began vaccinating every dog for K9 influenza at intake (with booster at 14 days if still at shelter) – February 2011
- ✓ Began providing “wormer” for all dogs upon arrival at shelter

Strategy 2.B. – Add a minor treatment component to shelter services

- a. Treat minor illness (i.e. kennel cough and others)
- b. Provide isolation ward for minor illnesses

Progress...

- ✓ Fund-raising is underway with a proposed timeline for completion in the first quarter of 2014 for a shelter medical treatment ward
- ✓ Developed a partnership with the Community Foundation of North Texas (CFNT) to administer the fund-raising, donation management, and construction phases of the project.
- ✓ Plans and construction documents are being developed

GOAL #3 – Find owners or identify adoption or rescue homes for every animal coming to the shelter

Strategy 3.A. – Increase Reclaims and Rescues

- a. Develop a plan for financial hardships as barrier to reclaims
- b. Develop incentives for rescue groups to expand work with City
- c. Develop social media presence to promote real-time linkages to owners, adopters and rescue groups

Progress...

- ✓ Implemented community service in lieu of reclaim fee payment program
- ✓ Provide free spay/neuter and vaccinations for all rescued animals prior to pick up (or animals can be brought back for services)
- ✓ Volunteers have developed a Facebook page that highlights available animals and consistently communicates directly with potential adopters and rescue groups
- ✓ Number of animals released to rescue groups has increased by 150% since Facebook page implemented in May 2011

Strategy 3.B – Increase shelter pet adoptions

- a. Satellite adoption center(s)
- b. Mobile adoption expansion
- c. Expand community partnerships/promotions

Progress...

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- ✓ Created national model in partnership with PetSmart Charities and private donors to establish two satellite adoption centers inside PetSmart stores
 - For the 12-month period prior to opening the first PetSmart adoption center, averaged 112 adoptions per month
 - For the 19-month period with one additional PetSmart adoption center, averaged 241 adoptions per month (115% increase)
 - For the 16-month period with two additional PetSmart adoption centers, averaged 457 adoptions per month (additional 90% increase)
- ✓ Implemented several discount promotions and piggy-backed with PetSmart Charities national adoption events
- ✓ Mobile adoption vehicle purchased and now in use
- ✓ Several innovative marketing/promotion efforts, i.e. Cats Baseball team partnerships, TCU football promotions, Water Bill inserts, etc.
- ✓ Pet Finder / Petango web site participation

CONCLUSION:

Fort Worth has much to be proud of in the area of animal welfare and great strides have been made in recent years, but there is more work to do.

To briefly illustrate the progress Fort Worth's animal shelter has made toward increasing live outcomes, animals typically come to the shelter in one of three conditions:

- Tier 1 -- Healthy and ready to adopt;
- Tier 2 -- Injured, ill or with temperament issues that are potentially manageable with sufficient time and resources;
- Tier 3 -- Critically ill or injured or highly aggressive.

Prior to the PetSmart adoption center expansion, shelter staff was only able to adopt approximately 50% of our Tier 1 animals, much less address animals in Tier 2. With the PetSmart Charities partnership and two additional satellite adoption centers, our Tier 1 animals are, with very few exceptions, finding new homes! This enables us to pursue further partnerships and external resources to begin addressing Category 2 animals. As noted above, a treatment room is in our future; and with the addition of a community TNR program for feral cats our shelter's live release rate should climb even higher!

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We encourage advocates to participate in all of these efforts through volunteering at our shelter or at one of our PetSmart adoption centers, donating to our medical treatment ward project, our pet adoption programs and/or participating with viable non-profit rescue organizations to expand community capacity that will assist the City in further increasing its live release rate.

The Fort Worth animal shelter's live release rate is climbing. Through partnerships with other local groups, individuals and agencies, we are committed to further improving our live release rate and saving the lives of animals abandoned at our shelter.